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ON CERTAIN CRUELTIES

IN THE CATTLE TRAFFIC

PRACTISED

OF

THE UNITED KINGDOM

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF

A PAPER

READ AT THE MEETING OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCE CONGRESS AT
BELFAST, ON THE 21ST SEPTEMBER, 1867.

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OF THE

Belfast Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals,

ROBERT BOAG,
WILLIAM HUGH PATTERSON, } *Hon. Secs.*
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ON THE
CRUELITIES OF THE CATTLE TRAFFIC
OF
THE UNITED KINGDOM.

It is not without hesitation that I venture to trespass, for a very few moments, on the time of this meeting. This arises not from any doubt on my mind as to the importance of the subject to which I solicit your attention. That importance I may possibly exaggerate, from the special attention I have been lately giving to the subject; but I only state my unaffected opinion, when I say that, though many subjects of great public interest have been discussed at the present Congress, and some possessing a special interest for myself, I know none that exceeds in dignity the topic which I now bring under your notice. This, however, is not the place to urge personal impressions, but to bring forward facts, to refer to principles, and to deduce conclusions. And though the subject is a painful—an inexpressibly painful—one, the task, intellectually considered, is fortunately easy; for the facts are plain, and patent, and palpable; the principles to which we appeal are the laws of intuitive morality, and the maxims of social science; and the conclusions are reached without any elaborate processes of ratiocination. My hesitation arises from the fact, that having lately submitted to the public my views on this subject, in a Letter addressed to the Lord Mayor of Dublin, and being precluded by the rules of the Congress from travelling over the same ground again, I am obliged to treat the matter with less completeness, and therefore with less satisfaction to myself and to you, than I otherwise might hope to do. I trust we shall have from his Lordship himself an expression of the opinions which I know he holds most strongly, on the subject of my Paper. I am sure you will listen to them, not merely with the respect due to his

position, but as being the opinions of a man who has added honour to his office by the energetic determination he has manifested to suppress, as far as the existing state of the law enables him, practices of cruelty. I ventured to assure him, before leaving Dublin, that he would find in this city a state of public feeling keenly alive to the importance and dignity of the subject, and not only ready but eager to support any measures that might be devised for the reformation of the existing evils. In the town of Belfast there has long existed a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; and I may be permitted to say, that among the many proofs of almost unparalleled progress that your city presents, I know of none that deserves to be ranked higher as an evidence of your advancing civilisation than the continued and active support given to that Society. My Letter, I may observe, was written from the Ancient City of the Tribes, in whose history I do not consider it the least honourable incident that its name should be associated with the earliest legislative enactment for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. “Martin of Galway,” said Southey, “began a good work, and will ever be remembered for it with the honour that is due to those who have endeavoured to lessen the sum of suffering and wickedness in this wicked world.”

As you may have observed in the title of my Paper, I purpose to confine myself, almost exclusively, to one department of this large subject. There are some matters to which I shall not refer, because I am unwilling to shock the feelings of those who hear me, and, more especially, of the gentler portion of my audience. Other matters I will pass by, because I dare not frame in articulate language a statement of their atrocity. There is, however, one barbarity so flagrant, and which has so long and so loudly been calling in vain for Governmental or Magisterial intervention that, though I cannot without an effort approach it, I cannot pass it by without a dereliction of duty. It is one which alone is quite sufficient to demonstrate the necessity of licensed abattoirs. The Lord Mayor of Dublin has, I believe, succeeded in suppressing this atrocity within the limits of his jurisdiction; at least, I hope, he has succeeded; for who can tell of the cruelties that may be perpetrated in

private? I allude to the cruelty habitually practised in the slaughtering of Calves. Let it be remembered that this is no remnant of obsolete barbarism : it is practised every day and, there is reason to fear, in most of the cities in this great empire. Within the last month, a Justice of the Peace told me he had strong reason to believe, and to fear, that in a considerable town in this country this terrible practice was general. I am able to tell how distressing, and shocking, and sickening it has been to those who have felt it their duty to investigate these matters, to acquaint themselves with the details by which the desired whiteness of the flesh may be secured to gratify the palate—in this case, I should rather say, the eye—of man. I could unhappily tell how the animal is strung up by the hind legs, and a vein opened, and then closed, and then opened, and closed again, until, through tortures protracted and unspeakable, the last drop of blood is drained from the quivering frame, and the merciful hand of Death at last interposes to arrest the piteous pain, and dismiss the agonized life ! Let us kill what we must kill : but, as we look for mercy ourselves, let us strain every effort and energy to suppress this devilish cruelty. I would ask, in the language of an able writer, to whom I am much indebted in this Paper : “ If, after these disclosures, white veal is served up at any gentleman’s table, is it the butchers or their customers that are responsible for the cruelty ? ”

But to come to the more immediate subject of my Paper—the sufferings undergone by live-stock at Fairs, and in their transit by Railways and Steamboats. And here again, remember, I am not going to speak about a state of things that is isolated or exceptional. It would be illogical to found a general charge against the humanity of our people on occasional instances of abnormal ferocity or malice. I speak of the regular course of business, the everyday behaviour of whole classes of society, the systematic arrangements of public companies ; and I allege that the wanton brutalities and cruel neglect which may be witnessed at every hour in open day, on our fair-greens, along our quays and high roads, in railway trucks, and on board our steamers, exhibit an amount of cruelty

flagrantly at variance with the boasted civilisation of our times, and with our acknowledged duty to all God's sentient creatures.

Of the treatment of our Cattle at our fair-greens, take the following description of an eyewitness of great experience:—
 “At the toll-gate will be found posted a sturdy staff of officials, surrounded by the roughs of the surrounding neighbourhood, specially retained for the occasion, and provided with bludgeons of the most formidable description, usually loaded with lead; who, in order to prevent any animal passing out through the gate before the toll is settled, will beat back and cudgel, in the most brutal manner, any animal approaching it. Some few of the hindmost may escape, but the greater number are battered and bruised beyond belief.” The bruised and blackened portions of the carcase, as unsightly as they are unwholesome, are usually reserved by the butcher for his poor customers; but they make their appearance at the table of the rich often enough to tell how, in this civilised country, man exercises his sovereignty over his ‘poor earth-born companions and fellow-mortals.’

The savagery of the Fair-green is repeated in intenser forms in the Railway truck, and at the ports of embarkation. Not to speak of the merciless beatings with heavy sticks, and the overcrowding of the waggons and the unventilated holds of vessels, the general public will scarcely be prepared to hear that the animals, from the beginning to the end of journeys, some of which, as a rule, occupy thirty-six hours but are often more protracted, get no food or water; and this, though they are constantly kept standing for hours in trucks at the stations, often with an abundant supply of water almost within their very gaze, realizing the ghastly picture in *The Ancient Mariner*—

Water, water everywhere,
 But not a drop to drink!

It has been stated that they are not unfrequently removed from the waggons dead, having perished by that most terrible form of death—thirst. A gentleman, writing to me from Edinburgh last week, says—“Four days and nights we had cattle kept in trucks last May; two died.” It might be expected that motives

of self-interest alone would be a sufficient security against such cruelty or neglect; but such is not the case. A small percentage of animals killed by thirst or suffocation is submitted to by all parties as inevitable—as a drawback incidental to the more than countervailing advantages of large cargoes and low freights.

This state of things is doubtless to be attributed more largely to thoughtlessness than to intention. “The thoughtless cruelty in the world,” says an eminent thinker, “outweighs almost every other kind”—

Evil is wrought by want of Thought,
As well as want of Heart.

It was stated before the Committee of the House of Commons, that in ordinary weather a beast can be kept without water for twenty-four hours, and sustain no injury. On a matter of this kind, I confess, I should prefer the testimony of the ox (if it could be obtained) to that of the grazier. It is satisfactory to find that the Committee gave credit to the statement of one or two witnesses, that the difficulty of watering cattle while in a truck is not insuperable, and that when an ox is thirsty he will drink. I am satisfied that a single foundry in Belfast could supply in one week all the railways in the United Kingdom with Watering Troughs adequate for the purpose.

Let us take a special instance or two of the present state of the Traffic. A bullock “trucked” at Westport at 8.30 P.M., arrives in Dublin about 11 A.M. on the following morning: in a couple of hours it is shipped for Liverpool, and on its arrival there is sent by railway a considerable distance inland, and during all this time remains unfed and unwatered. Again, what is the ordinary course of Traffic between this country and Scotland? You will find it described in a book which I would strongly recommend to the attention of my audience:—“The Story of the Truck,” by Mr. Reid, of Gran-
ton. “Cattle are purchased at some fair in Ireland, driven to the steamer, and crammed into a filthy hold without food or water; a heated atmosphere to smother in, perhaps twenty or

thirty hours, or longer, according to the weather. They are, on landing, removed to be trucked, say to Falkirk fair, and, in nine cases out of ten, without either water or food. They are hurried out of the trucks; panting and heated they reach the market-place, there they remain on their legs all day, still without water or food (being unsold). They are again hurried off to another fair, say, to Forfar, which the train may reach in ten or twelve hours, with exactly, the same result. The cattle are unsold, and brought back to Glasgow, after having undergone fatigue, heat, cold, hunger, and thirst, which would have killed a giant with nerves of iron; and if he had been so fortunate as to come through the ordeal alive, from the change of temperature from the hold of the overheated vessel to the railway trucks, he would have been lame for life with rheumatic pains."

Such are the scenes which are every day witnessed at our Railways and our Ports: scenes at which Mercy shudders, and Pity veils her face! And yet it is generally acknowledged (the physiologist having placed it beyond doubt) that these creatures possess the same sentient apparatus, the same capacities of feeling and of suffering, and the same instincts with our own species. True, they have no voice that can utter a remonstrance—that can reveal their wretchedness; but there is an eloquence in that silence, and the very shroud that disguises the suffering only serves to aggravate its horrors.

It has often struck me as a just and original observation of that accomplished and eloquent philosopher, Dugald Stewart, that the selfishness and apparent hardheartedness of man arise in a great measure from want of Imagination, a faculty which, like all the others with which we are endowed, was meant to subserve some useful purposes, and, like them, requires development and exercise. The gentleman grazier of Meath or Limerick contemplates with admiration the fine form of an ox in his rich pastures, and probably with still deeper satisfaction calculates its material value; but he seldom brings before his mind that series of horrors to which the poor animal is doomed—horrors of which the butcher's knife is only the merciful end. The traveller, in prosecution of business or in quest of picturesque

scenery, is whirled in the express train past the siding into which those long cavalcades of inarticulate misery are shunted ; but little he guesses at the meaning of these drooping heads, these wistful eyes imploringly gazing at him, from which there almost seems to look out an expression of confused wonder and amazement at the wanton cruelties and barbarities of earth's constituted lord. So true is it that custom can familiarize us with many practices which we should certainly reprobate if they were less common ; that suffering which is out of sight is commonly out of mind ; and that the most sensitive feelings may become indurated by use and wont.

I will trouble the meeting with but one instance more, to show how the trade in Fowl, which has of late years assumed such large proportions, has been carried on. I have every reason to fear that it describes only too accurately the general course of that trade. "Last night," says the Secretary of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, in a letter to the *Times*, "at 8.40, on passing the parcels-office at the Waterloo Station, I heard a singular noise, which induced me to examine a crate, when I discovered a number of wretched imprisoned ducks, apparently dead and dying, exhausted by overcrowding. The heads of eight poor creatures were hanging helplessly through the strands of the crate, and their beaks opened and closed languidly at intervals. I counted eleven apparently gasping for breath, some of which, by the pressure of the crowd of living, struggling animals inside, had been squeezed out of shape, their heads screwed under their bodies, or their necks twisted towards their tails. I counted twenty weaker than others, which had been trodden down, and lay prostrate, with as many ducks standing upon their bodies. Many had their eyes partly closed, not as in sleep, but as death only closes them. The railway officers, as soon as these facts were pointed out to them, appeared very anxious to relieve the sufferers, but said, 'It is more than we dare do to open parcels and packages of which we are only the carriers.' The police could not give an order of release, the consigner was in Guernsey, the consignee miles away from his shop at Newgate Market. At the risk, therefore, of an action, I caused the

crate to be opened, and the captives to be set free, and then penned up in the station yard, protected by a watchman, whom I paid to remain with them all night. Such demonstrations of gratitude I never before witnessed as when the poor birds sniffed fresh air and enjoyed the luxury which freedom gave them of extending their legs and wings. Even the feelings of cabmen were softened by the exhibition, and they threw down among them handfuls of corn, and brought up pails of water. It was gratifying to look upon railway porters, cabmen, and labourers using every stratagem to restore animation in the animals that had swooned, or had become paralysed in their limbs, and to supply the necessities of those which pleaded with dumb earnestness for water; but among this mixed body of volunteers and spectators there was but one voice against the perpetrator of this brutality, and that was of bitter complaint. After much perseverance, all the animals were pronounced out of danger, except three, the lives of which had evidently been trodden out. The crate had come from Guernsey, and it was found, on measurement, that seventy-two ducks had been placed in a superficial space of seven feet by two feet! The calculation is easy, but it is revolting. Should any or all of these die on their passage—pluck their feathers, powder their bodies, and they will pass, sell, and be consumed as slaughtered poultry. I am in a position to state that this is not a solitary instance. . . . Surely steam vessels, railway trucks, and other conveyances should be constructed with a view to the protection of animals (so soon to be turned into human flesh and blood) from the most sickening atrocities, as well as for the pecuniary advantage of traders or shareholders, just as public opinion demanded proper appointments in emigrant vessels before leaving port. In the latter case it became a question of human life and health, and it is not less the same question when human food is subjected to conditions which produce disease and death in the animals, and as surely in man also."

I might enforce my argument by considerations of an economic character. I have evidence to show that many of the most successful cattle-dealers in the kingdom find a course

directly the opposite of that which I have been describing to pay better. By careful provision for the refreshment of cattle upon the journey, and by exercising supervision over their drovers, these dealers obtain prices for their beasts from 10 to 20 per cent. higher than their neighbours. The evidence of this kind is superfluously conclusive: but I am unwilling to rest my argument on this ground, solid though it be. I believe, after all that has been said of the thoughtlessness and selfishness of mankind, that an appeal is never made in vain to our moral feelings and the principles of humanity. The question is one of *Duty*. It is one, moreover, deeply affecting the fibre of national character. Nations in which large classes habitually indulge in cruelty to the brute creation, and in which such cruelty passes unrebuked and unpunished by the rest, will cease to advance, if they do not retrograde, in civilisation. Violence and rudeness will prevail among the lower strata, and a cynical hardness of heart among the upper. The principle of cruelty being allowed to take root in our dealings with the lower animals, will reach to and infect our dealings with each other. The brutalized porters and drovers and hangers-on of the market-place, the railway, and the steam-ship, will constitute a seed-plot of crime, and the clumsy device of the gallows and the expensive apparatus of the convict prison must be kept in constant requisition to save the social fabric from destruction.

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